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THE BEGINNINGS OF MISSION NUESTRA SENORA DEL  
REFUGIO

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A short time ago Professor Barker, of the University of Texas, kindly sent me the following extract from the Lamar Papers, informing me that it was written by James Kerr, surveyor for DeWitt's Colony, probably between 1837 and 1839:

*First Settlements on Matagorda Bay*

On the west bank of the Garcites Creek,—and is called to this day old La Bahia and about one and half league above its mouth are to be seen the ruins of a fort and village, said to be the first settlement of La Salle, and is that settlement no doubt which some have represented as founded on the Lavaca river or river of Cows—La Salle or the Jesuits who came with him built a Mission on the margin of the bay del espiritu Santo and about 800 yards from the mouth of the Guadalupe river—some of the posts and other ruins are remaining to this day.<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen that the first statement by Kerr confirms the identification which I have recently made of the location of La Salle's colony.<sup>2</sup> In his second statement, however, Kerr is evidently in error. The ruins to which he refers, I conjecture, were those of Mission Nuestra Señora del Refugio, at its first site, before its removal to Copano Bay. *Apropos* of Kerr's note, and since the fact that this mission once existed near the lower Guadalupe seems never to have been recorded in history, I submit the following brief and tentative sketch of the beginnings of the establishment. It was written some two years ago in answer to an inquiry by a friend, and makes no pretense at completeness or finality. It is based on considerable manuscript material in my possession. I have not had opportunity as yet to fully digest all of this material, but since it may be some time before I can give the matter further attention, I offer the note to QUARTERLY readers with the hope that it may justify the space assigned it.

<sup>1</sup>Lamar Papers, No. 1642, Miss West's Calendar, Anonymous notes.

<sup>2</sup>*Austin American*, July 19, 1914; *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, II, 165-182, September, 1915.

The founding of the mission of Nuestra Señora del Refugio was closely connected with plans for Texas of great breadth and importance; or, it might be said, its founding was the slender outcome of these larger plans, which had to be set aside by force of untoward circumstances.

Its inception reaches back many years before 1790, but it was in that year that the developments began which led immediately to the establishment of the mission. The proximate occasion seems to have been inter-college rivalry. In 1790 news reached the College of Guadalupe de Zacatecas that the College of Pachuca had asked permission to enter northern Texas to undertake missionary work. This led "the Apostolic emulation" of the members of the College of Guadalupe, who already had more than twenty missions in various parts of New Spain, to renew their efforts in northern Texas. It was asserted in the college that it had never abandoned the field in question, and that the sister college would be an inter-loper. As a result of several meetings of the *Discretorio*, Fray Manuel Julio de Silva, who had recently been elected to the high office of *comisario y prefecto* of the missions of New Spain, was authorized to undertake the launching of a broad program for work among the Tawakoni, Kichai, Taguayas, Tonkawa, Comanche, and other northern tribes, none of whom had been under missionary influence. In other words, the field of northern Texas opened by De Mézières through his recent journeys had attracted the attention of the college.

Father Silva accepted the charge, and chose as his companion Father José Mariano Garza, who had figured in the founding of the town of Pilar de Bucareli on the Trinity River, and who had subsequently served at Nacogdoches. Leaving Zacatecas by different routes, on January 1, 1791, the two met at the Hospice of Boca de Leones. Continuing thence, they reached La Bahia (now Goliad) on February 19, 1791.

At the outset the great scheme for northern Texas was interfered with by one of the ever-present difficulties of the Indian situation. It was at this time that Colonel Ugalde, *comandante* of the Eastern Interior Provinces, was undertaking his campaigns against the Lipan, and the authorities would permit no expedition to the northern tribes. In consequence, Fathers Silva and Garza turned their attention to a lesser problem, as a temporary occu-

pation. Just at this time the mission of Nuestra Señora del Rosario, near La Bahía, which had several times been abandoned, was in the process of revival, and Fathers Silva and Garza took a hand in the work while they were waiting for larger things.

The efforts to secure neophytes for the mission of Nuestra Señora del Rosario unexpectedly opened the way to the founding of a new mission for the Karankawan tribes of the coast. On March 31, 1791, Fresada Pinta, a heathen Karankawa chief, appeared at Mission Rosario. On leaving he promised to return ten days later with an escort, to conduct Father Silva to visit his people. In fact, he reappeared on April 7 with twenty-four warriors. On the tenth they set out, accompanied by five soldiers and two mission Indians. On the twelfth they reached the village of Fresada Pinta, which was a settlement of considerable size.

Father Silva said nothing about founding a mission, but devoted his attention only to making friends with the heathen. When he left it was with the promise from the Indians that they would always receive the missionaries well, even though the Karankawa should be at war with the soldiers. From this place Father Silva passed on to the village of another chief, named Llano Grande, where the same diplomatic policy was observed. Here he met some apostates from Mission Rosario, and took them back to the mission, promising to return to visit all the villages of the coast.

Father Silva was now recalled to Zacatecas to preach the sermon of the provincial chapter, and, being unable to return to Texas, he put the work with the Karankawa into the hands of Father Garza, as his deputy. Father Garza made several more visits to the coast, but as yet said nothing about missions, leaving the request to come from the Indians. On October 24, 1791, the hoped for petition was made. When Father Garza returned from the coast to Rosario on that day with fifty-two apostates in his train, he found awaiting him Fresada Pinta, desirous of taking him again to his village. At just the same time Father Garza was sent for by Chief Llano Grande.

Setting out with Fresada Pinta, Father Garza reached the village on October 28, finding there one hundred and twenty-four persons, assembled for the express purpose of asking for a mission in their own country, in order that they might not be obliged to leave the coast. Passing on, Father Garza reached the village of

Llano Grande on the 30th. This village was located at the junction of the San Antonio with the Guadalupe. Here, too, was an assemblage of Indians, likewise clamoring for a mission, for which they chose a site near the spot, called by Garza Refugio, because he had been there on July 17, 1791.

Returning to La Bahía, Garza reported to Governor Muñoz and requested his aid. The governor asked for a report on the site, that he might use it as a basis for a report to Mexico. This was on November 22. Without waiting for the report, Muñoz sent Garza's letter to the viceroy, who called a *junta* on January 4, 1792. The *junta*, without waiting for further reports, ordered the founding of the desired mission. This was unusually prompt work.

Father Silva went from Zacatecas to the City of Mexico, reaching there after the founding of the mission had been ordered. But he proposed, as a means of carrying out his larger project, the secularization of Mission Valero and several other old missions on the Texas frontier.

Returning to Texas affairs, it may be said that Father Garza in August went again to the coast, where he found 208 Indians at Muelle Viejo (Old Wharf), where he left them while he returned to La Bahía. Muelle Viejo seems to have been at the village or near the village of Llano Grande. In December President López called Garza to San Antonio to see about carrying out the order, which had arrived from Mexico, to found the new mission. In January, 1793, Father Garza returned, now in company with Governor Muñoz and Father Velasco to Muelle Viejo to found the mission, finding at the spot 138 persons, the rest having dispersed to hunt subsistence.

Muñoz wished to found the mission on February 2, but the friars preferred to wait till the 4th, Refugio's day.<sup>3</sup> The governor insisted, the fathers yielded, and it was planned to perform the ceremony on February 3; but a storm arose, and the patron saint had her way, the mission being founded on the 4th, with 238 Indians. At this time temporary buildings were put up. The site was near the junction of the San Antonio and the Guadalupe.

<sup>3</sup>I do not turn aside here to identify the saints' days mentioned, but merely summarize Father Garza's statements.

Thus was founded a ninth mission near the little stream called the San Antonio River.

It is a matter of interest to note that the Countess of Valenciana had promised to bear all of the expenses for the mission, but for some reason she changed her mind, and the Lady of Refuge remained, as Father Garza put it, "sole patroness."

Some difficulties soon arose regarding the choice of the site. The consequence was that on November 21, 1794, the commandant-general of the Interior Provinces gave orders for transferring the mission to a place designated by Father Silva. On December 7 of the same year Governor Muñoz delegated this task to Juan Cortés, of La Bahía. The order was carried out in 1795. This explains why the ruins of Mission Refugio are at the Copano Bay and not at the mouth of the San Antonio. It seems probable, on the other hand, that the name Mission Bay, at the mouth of the Guadalupe River, is a permanent mark of the brief career of the mission in that locality.